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ABSTRACT

Screening and evaluating law enforcement candidates for employment as police officers is a complex task. It has been recommended that a clinical interview and comprehensive battery of psychological tests may aid in evaluation. The Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) is often used for this type of psychological screening. Peer assessment may also be a potentially useful method of evaluating law enforcement candidates. This study examined the association of MMPI data to peer assessment data in law enforcement candidates. Law enforcement trainees (N=45) completed the MMPI, the Shipley Institute of Living Scale, and demographic information. Trainees evaluated their peers on three scales measuring likelihood to succeed as a law enforcement officer, interpersonal responsivity, and technical ability. Two instructors completed the same ranking and rating procedure. The results revealed that peer assessment measures correlated significantly with mean instructor evaluations and the candidate's final examination scores. The peer assessment measures appeared to be internally consistent in distinguishing who was predicted as most likely to be a successful police officer. Certain MMPI scales accounted for 18% of the variance in overall peer rankings. These findings suggest that peer assessment methods can assist in selection, screening, promotion, and other evaluative procedures with law enforcement personnel. (Author/NB)

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Assessment of Law Enforcement Candidates: Peer Evaluations and the MMPI

by
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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the association of MMPI data to Peer Assessment data in entry level law enforcement candidates. The results reveal that peer assessment measures correlate significantly with mean instructor evaluations and the candidate's final exam scores. Three peer assessment measures appear to be internally consistent in distinguishing who was predicted as most likely to be a successful police officer. A bivariate regression analysis revealed that F and Overcontrolled Hostility (OH) scales of the MMPI accounted for 18% of the variance in overall peer rankings. Peer assessment methods can assist in selection, screening, promotion, and other evaluative procedures with law enforcement personnel.

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Assessment of Law Enforcement Candidates: Peer Evaluations and the MMPI

Problem

Screening and evaluating law enforcement candidates for employment as police officers is a complex task. Objective tests requiring knowledge of procedural information and mastery of technical skills are common methods of evaluation. Scogin and Beutler (1986) recommend adding a clinical interview and a comprehensive battery of psychological tests to the evaluative process designed to uncover personality features that may interfere with competent professional behavior.

One of the most frequently used personality tests for psychological screening of this sort is the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (Murphy, 1972). Several studies have examined the usefulness if the MMPI in predicting police officer performance. Saxe and Reiser (1976) found that MMPI scores differentiated officers who remained from those who quit the Los Angeles Police Department. These authors note that since both groups fell within "normal" ranges on the scale, the utility of the MMPI in predicting subsequent officer performance may be limited. Beutler et al. (1985) found significant associations between several individual MMPI and composite scale scores and officer performance. For example, mean MMPI scale elevation and subsequent officer suspensions were positively correlated. While the MMPI appears to possess some predictive validity, the

establishment and cutoff scores with adequate sensitivity and specificity has not yet been achieved (Scogin and Beutler, 1986).

The trust, dependence, and camaraderie among fellow police officers makes the method of peer assessment a potentially useful method of evaluating law enforcement candidates. Peer assessment has proven to be a reliable and valid method in predicting successful military officers, and has been used effectively in industrial management settings for hiring, promotion, and transfer purposes (Landy, 1985).

Obtaining information regarding the perceptions of fellow officers within law enforcement training and work settings might be a vital contribution in predicting present and future performance criteria. Love (1981) has found that the use of peer assessment in the appraisal process is an accurate and consistent method in measuring several performance dimensions in the law enforcement setting.

The purpose of this study is to examine the association of MMPI data to peer assessment data in entry level law enforcement candidates. Convergence of the data sources would lend support to the greater utilization of these assessment techniques in law enforcement screening.

Method

Subjects

The subjects were 45 trainees from the Law Enforcement Academy of The University of Alabama. The trainees lived

together in a dormitory during their training, except for the weekends. Approximately fifty percent of the trainees enrolled in four consecutive training sessions volunteered for this study.

Procedure

Demographic information such as sex, age, and months of law enforcement experience (MLE) were collected on each subject. The Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory and the Shipley Institute of Living Scale were administered to each subject. At the end of each training period, and prior to the final academy examination, the trainees evaluated their peers on three scales. They ranked their fellow trainees from "most successful" to "least successful" based on a perception of their "likelihood to succeed as a law enforcement officer". They also rated their peers using a seven point likert scale anchored from "poor" to "excellent" on two areas labeled "interpersonal responsivity" (IR) and "technical ability" (TA) (Beutler et al., 1985). Technical ability was defined to characterize one's procedural knowledge, adherence to physical appearance codes, and use of equipment. Interpersonal responsivity has to do with the degree of maturity, judgment, acceptance of supervision, and ability to contribute to team objectives. Two instructors who had regular contact with the trainees completed the same ranking and rating procedure. Final objective exam scores were collected for each trainee at the end of the seven week training period.

Results

The results reveal that peer assessment measures correlate significantly with mean instructor evaluations and the

candidate's final objective exam scores (see Table 1). Rank, IR, and TA measures appear to be internally consistent in distinguishing who was predicted as most likely to be a successful police officer. Exam scores, considered more reflective of technical knowledge than interpersonal ability, were correlated more highly with TA scores and IQ than with IR scores. Neither peer or instructor evaluations were associated with MLE or IQ.

An intercorrelation matrix reveals significant relationships between peer rankings and two MMPI scale scores: F, $r = -.38$, $p < .05$ and OH (overcontrolled hostility), $r = .31$, $p < .05$. A bivariate regression analysis was conducted using F and OH scores as predictors and PRP as the predicted variable. This resulted in an R of .42, $p < .05$. Thus, approximately 18% of the variance in PRP was accounted for by systematic selection of MMPI scale scores. This proportion of variance accounted for is quite similar to other psychological screening predictive validity studies.

Interpretation

The findings of this study point to the potential utility of peer assessment and specific MMPI scale scores (F and OH) in the prediction of success in law enforcement. Peers may have some power in predicting success on objective test performance and supervisor ratings of fellow trainees due to their close involvement with each other. The F scale and the OH scale of the MMPI are shown to be two scales that may shed light on this relationship.

Peers and their instructors tend to agree on the ranking of the trainees adding consistency and meaning to the evaluative process. Objective exam scores are associated with this relationship providing additional support and strength to the peer assessment method.

Research has revealed two factors that seem to be related to effective police work and associated with psychological test performance. These two factors, represented in this study by the IR and TA measures, were found to be consistently associated with overall peer ranking scores. Further validation studies using these factors should be explored.

Implications of peer assessment and the use of the MMPI extend beyond their usefulness in predicting a trainee's success in a training program. Peer assessment methods can assist in selection and screening, promotions, and other evaluative procedures. The ability of fellow officers to act as reliable and valid predictors of future success as a law enforcement officer needs further evaluation. Longitudinal on the job follow-up studies are recommended to test the predictive power of the MMPI and peer assessment.

Table 1.

Intercorrelation matrix of police trainee evaluation types

	Peer			Instructor			Objective		
	Rank	IR	TA	Rank	IR	TA	Exam	MLE	IQ
Objective									
IQ	-.20	.15	.17	-.22	.24	.32	.58	.32	
MLE	-.21	.23	.21	-.14	.12	.14	.36		
Exam	-.44	.37	.44	-.41	.27	.63			
Instructor									
TA	-.70	.63	.61	-.84	.63				
IR	-.55	.48	.43	.79					
Rank	.68	-.56	-.60						
Peer									
TA	-.72	.89							
IR	-.68								

Note. A low rank score indicates high standing in the class
IR: interpersonal responsivity
TA: technical ability
MLE: months in law enforcement

If r>.304 then p<.05 (two tailed).
If r>.393 then p<.01 (two tailed).

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